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ABSTRACT

This volume contains representative papers presented at the annual conference on children's literature at Miami University, 24 April 1976. The papers are: "New Directions for Children's Literature" by Sam Leaton Sebesta; "Storytelling: An Ancient Delight" by E. Ann Johnson; "Folklore" by Soledad Newman; "Using Bibliotherapy and Television in the Classroom" by Alfred Ciani; "The Critic and the Child" by Rebecca Lukens; "Anecdotes about American Authors" by Mabel E. Eldridge; and "Suggestions for Writing and Publishing Children's Books" by Nicholas P. Georgiady. (LL)

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Report on the Proceedings of the Fifth
Annual Conference on Children's Literature

Miami University, April 24, 1976

sponsored by
The Department of Teacher Education

Eileen Tway
Editor

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Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is the result of the increasing interest in Miami University's annual conference in Children's Literature. It is an attempt to record the conference highlights for those who attended and to share the experience with those who were unable to attend. Not all conference highlights are included in this small bulletin, but the papers contained in this report are representative.

First, the essence of Sam Leaton Sebesta's keynote talk is expressed in his paper, "New Directions for Children's Literature." Sebesta's paper and the following papers on Storytelling, Folklore, Bibliotherapy and Television, and Criticism build on the past while presenting new directions.

E. Ann Johnson says that storytelling is the oldest means of entertainment and education. Yet she suggests that enthusiastic storytellers can provide an ever-new aesthetic experience when listeners ask for more and more. Soledad Newman shows that while folklore may be a traditional literature, it can open new directions in literature when new sources are sought and found. Alfred Ciani goes beyond books to the nonprint media of television and discusses how bibliotherapy can help mesh television viewing and reading experience. Direction from children is considered by Rebecca Lukens as she discusses the ways in which good literature satisfies both the literary critic and the child.

Finally, Mabel Eldridge shares personal glimpses of some favorite American Authors who built on their own past experiences to provide pleasure for present-day and future readers, and Nicholas Georgiady comments on writing and publishing children's books. He shares the excitement of both the reading and the writing of children's literature.

It is hoped that these papers on old-into-new directions will reinforce the new directions heralded at the 1976 Conference.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

No. 1 1976

Report of the Fifth Annual Conference on Children's Literature

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NEW DIRECTIONS FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by
Sam Leaton Sebesta
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Seattle, Washington

Where have we been? Where are we going? And what does reading have to do with our past and our hope for the future? Those are questions for all of us during the Bicentennial. They are related questions. We can't make much progress toward the Tricentennial until we know about the past.

So a first assignment might be to read Nila Banton Smith's AMERICAN READING INSTRUCTION. (1) It's a documented history, showing that we've made good strides in teaching a growing, diversifying nation how to read. We've made progress in learning what decoding is. We've begun in the past 50 years to sort out needs in comprehension and how to begin to meet those needs. We seem to be on our way.

What becomes clear at the 200-year mark is that reading is culture-centered. Smith's history shows that. When the culture is closed, intent on teaching agreed-upon principles, reading method and content are closed, too. When the culture is intent upon conformity, that's where reading presents a conformity pattern, too. When, as now, the culture is transitional and diversified, reading methods and content reflect those shifting values. Depending on one's own value system, these are either the best of times or the worst of times for the future of reading.

I think they are the best of times for reading. The fact that this conference is about new directions for children's literature instead of a new decoding method or a new way to systematize someone into doing workbook pages is very encouraging. The emphasis I see over the country on what to read and how to get involved with what one reads is encouraging.

That children have a right to be entertained and informed when they read, not that they must be drilled and grilled for some nebulous future success in adult reading--that is the most encouraging trend of all.

The authors and publishers of children's literature are attempting to keep in step with these times. Let me give some general examples. Who would have thought that now, in our Bicentennial, we would have a historical juvenile novel whose theme is that the Revolution should not have been fought? (2) Who a century ago would have guessed that the best new biography about a Revolutionary War soldier would be about a woman? (3) The new books about American heroes avoid the old tradition of making their subjects seem super-perfect and they avoid the newer tradition of picking them to pieces: instead, these new books present lively, sometimes comical persons--above all, persons with whom a child can identify. (4, 5, 6) The path back to the birth of the nation is much easier to track now, thanks to good fiction and non-fiction, than ever before.

You can find new distinguished books on nearly any topic or theme. Many are books that would not or could not have been written a quartercentury ago. They are books to meet the needs of the times, some of them. John Donovan's FAMILY (7) is such a book, although it may be just a bit ahead of its time. Paige Dixon's MAY I CROSS YOUR GOLDEN RIVER (8) is another--the best book I read last year. So, structurally, is M.E. Kerr's admirable LOVE IS A MISSING PERSON. (9) I don't think we've ever had so many books to challenge our taste. I used to think that I knew a good book from a bad book: my main job was to get children to agree with me. Now my biggest challenge when I read a trend-setter is to dig inside myself and figure out what I really think of it. Development of taste in literature is a lifelong job.

I do like a great many books that are not trend-setters. I'm glad that someone still writes them. I sympathize with

the non-eager reader in lower intermediate grades who wants a simple plot that lifts him or her right off the chair. Graham Oakley's Church Cat and his mice do that. (10, 11) A good, straight story such as MY ROBOT BUDDY does it, too. (12) And, for upper grades, THE PERILOUS GARD, by Elisabeth Pope wins hands down. (13)

But there's a problem facing children's literature. The titles and topics are there, but a good book unopened is not a literary experience. More than we realize, our culture is producing people who can read but don't, or people who do read but don't enjoy it very much. Our massive non-print media, for better or worse, condition us toward passive viewing, a kind of semi-involvement that can make the habit of active readership a difficult habit to attain. So one of our tasks now, as workers with literature, is to help potential readers find out that reading is becoming what you are reading about.

How do we teach active involvement in the reading of literature? How do we teach active concentration? As we sail toward a Tricentennial,how do we subvert what one writer has called "the decline of attention"?

I believe the first step is an oral one. It's an involving experience to articulate good literary language. You can begin with poems whose refrains are memorable--for instance, Laura E. Richards' turn-of-the-century jingle "The Baby Goes to Boston" with its "loky moky poky stoky/Smoky choky chee!" (14) And there are hundreds of others. Use, too, stories that invite the listener to join in. This year's Caldecott Award book, WHY MOSQUITOES BUZZ IN PEOPLE'S EARS (15), has rich funny animal speech that you can put on a chart and rehearse with your listeners before reading the book to them. In a similar manner, you can involve the pre-reader in telling his or her own version of a wordless picture book. (16) Literary involvement begins orally.

Literal comprehension involving the reader can be served through a relatively new technique called story theater. While

the story is read or told by one student, others mime its plot. The involvement of body is no less important than speech when it comes to developing active readers. Any well-plotted objective story works for story theater. I'm particularly fond of using African folk tales from THE KING'S DRUM (17) and picture books with "crowd scenes" such as WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE. (18) Give your pupils three "rules" to be followed for story theater: volunteer, mime, and disband. Plan to take a part, not sit back as audience; plan to do your part in pantomime, not speaking lines; plan to get out of the way of the action as soon as a scene is over. It's really a simple technique--and very useful and effective at all levels.

Inferential comprehension is another matter. For the past several years we've over-emphasized the use of open, inferential questions. I say over-emphasized because, despite their good intent, such questions often mean passive talk outside the literary experience, not active participation within the literary experience. Look for chances to develop inferential questions toward activity, such as role-playing. For example, read a story such as a GEORGE AND MARTHA story (19) or a Konigsburg story (20) up to the point where a problem must be solved. Ask inferential questions to help students hypothesize about how the problem could be solved. Then choose your characters and act out those hypotheses. The acting, the role-playing, brings the needed involvement. It gives an instant use for the otherwise passive discussion. It helps the budding readers become what they're reading about!

I realize that in these suggestions for activity I've touched only the tip of the iceberg. But I know that active-reader teachers have a wealth of ideas and examples of their own. In the end, we are not talking about active involvement in reading only but about active involvement in living. We are talking about aesthetic experience, whether in reading or music or art. We are talking about the dimension of experience which makes us aware that "life has loveliness to sell." (21)

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STORYTELLING : AN ANCIENT DELIGHT
(and still an ever-new aesthetic experience)

by
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The oldest means of entertainment and education is storytelling. The individual who mastered the art was held in high regard. It was he who knew the history of the village, was responsible for educating the young and could provide instant entertainment in a verbal form.

Storytelling today is more common than we may think. Hopefully its popularity will grow. The stand-up comedian, the office worker who can relate a weekend fishing trip so you hear the birds sing and the fish hit the water, and the teen who can mimic the classroom dialogue so that the entire bus shrills, "that's her--that's Teach-", have the storytelling techniques. We more often think of a group of young children clustered around a librarian on a carpeted library floor.

Storytelling can be anywhere with any age. Required are the teller--the story--the listener.

A storyteller begins by liking books, stories, events and people and having the desire for one to be shared by the other.

The techniques of telling a story can be developed by reading aloud to people. This offers several opportunities: provides practice in being before a group, builds self-confidence, offers opportunities to try out stories for appeal, provides practice in developing voice characterizations.

Selecting the story should be an individual thing. The teller should be comfortable with the tale. Stories with action, repetition of action and patterned words, and characters that are imitable lend themselves to storytelling. There is an abundance of printed material--stories, anthologies, collections of stories.

The setting enhances the story. The mood can be set by physical arrangement of the room, teller, and the listener.

Interest is sparked by "dressing the part". The teller may dress the part of a "storyteller" or assume a characteristic of one of those in the story. Just the addition of a jacket, hat, scarf, of an object mentioned or suggested by the story will spark interest. Music can be part of the story or help to set the tone for the telling.

The time is not important. Whenever the teller feels like relating a story and has a listener, is the time for storytelling. It does not have to be a structured, set period. The beginner will find the spontaneous, informal opportunities better for him and the veteran storyteller will make and take every opportune moment to tell a good story.

The single most vital ingredient for a successful storytelling is enthusiasm. That's YOUR responsibility if you want to share stories. If you're enthusiastic, the listeners will be there--enjoying the story with you and asking for another--and another--please, just one more.

FOLKLORE

by Soledad P. Newman
Miami University

Folklore. Just what is folklore? Is it merely the lore of unlettered folk? What does it include? Why is it important in children's literature?

These and many other questions could be asked, but let us begin by defining the term. Folklore means "those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form or by means of customary example."[1] The definition here cited not only answers some of the questions already posed, but it also includes the most significant characteristics of the discipline. "Any group" clearly indicates that folklore exists in all segments of society, among the unlettered and the sophisticated. "Oral" and "Customary example" restrict the type of material transmitted from generation to generation to that passed by word of mouth or by example. "Versions" allude to the variant forms in which folklore exists. And, although not included in the definition, anonymity is also an important characteristic.

With these characteristics in mind, what material, then, does folklore include? Folklore encompasses within its domain a large body of material which is divided by one leading folklorist into three classifications: 1. Verbal, 2. Partly Verbal, and 3. Non-Verbal.[2]

Verbal folklore, the most popular classification among scholars in the United States, consists of many genres ranging from the simplest folk speech, to the most complex varieties, the folk narratives. Traditional phrases and sentences which make up proverbs, folk riddles, folk rhymes, and folksongs are some of the other genres.

Popular beliefs, superstitions, folk games, folk dreams, folk dances, folk customs, and folk festivals make up the body of lore classified under partly verbal folklore. As the term indicates both verbal and non-verbal elements combine in this

type of material.

Non-verbal folklore includes under its category the traditional materials of folk architecture, arts, crafts, costumes, foods, gestures, and folk music.[3]

Verbal lore, however, includes genres which are closely related to children's literature.

The fairy tale or, more appropriately, the Marchen, "a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes...moving..in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and filled with the marvelous,"[4] is the best known genre under Verbal Folklore. In spite of the fact that some writers[5] feel that there is nothing "fresh" about the folk tales, these narratives continue to appeal to children and adults alike for a number of reasons:

First, the tale begins with a leisurely introduction which, in most cases, is a formulaic opening. "Once upon a time," "in a land far away," "there was once a king who had twelve beautiful daughters but none of them was married," or "there was once a poor girl called Cherry, one of a family of ten who lived in Zennor" are only a few of these openings.

Second, characterization is simple. Characters tend to be flat and description of them is objective. They tend to remain static, unchanged. Frequently in characterization, contrasting characters are used. The good and the evil sister appear side by side. The industrious, courteous, generous youngest brother is often pitted against the two older brothers who are lazy, discourteous, and selfish. And, usually, the youngest is the victor.

Third, the plot is simple. It is not the complicated, complex kind of plot of, say, a modern short story or novel. Complexity in the tale depends primarily on the number of incidents and motifs which the narrator or writer chooses to employ. The majority of long fairy tales usually develop these incidents in series of threes or fours, depending on the culture in which the story originates. For example, in "The Gambler and the Devil"

the hero must perform three impossible tasks before he is rewarded. The hero accomplishes the tasks with the aid of the devil's youngest daughter, but the tale does not end here. In most versions the hero is required to perform an additional three tasks and so it goes. On the other hand, there are tales where the hero quickly performs the assigned task.

Four, style is also simple and employs many similes and metaphors. A princess is so beautiful that her face is like the sun and brightens any place where she goes. A witch has a heart of stone.

Dialogue consists of short and pertinent exchanges of information. Seldom are additional details given, though repetition is frequently used. The latter, however, is frequently used to create suspense and to fill out the core of the Marchen.

Fifth, the ending of most tales is a formulaic one. In many tales, the hero rescues his sweetheart, they marry and live happily ever after. Some tales end with punishment being meted out to the evil characters. One version of "Cinderella" has the cruel stepmother being invited to the wedding. However, when she arrives at the palace she is forced to put on some red hot iron shoes and she dances until she drops dead. In most instances, the good are rewarded and the evil get their just deserts, and the listener or reader readily accepts the ending.

For the reasons discussed, the folktales continue to be perennial favorites of children and adults. Writers still find inspiration for new literary works, particularly in children's literature. Perhaps some authors feel that the genre has lost its appeal because too many of the Marchen adapted for use by children are taken from the same sources again and again. It is true, for example, that many stories have been translated and adapted from the Grimm Brothers' Household Tales or Charles Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales. However, this situation need not exist, for there are many collections of Marchen which have not come to the attention of the general public.

The Marchen, however, is only one genre of Verbal Folklore. Others which play an equally prominent role in children's literature are the myth and the legend. Like the Marchen, the myth takes place in a world other than the present world and deals mainly with the sacred and with gods, demigods, supernatural creatures and the origins of all things, usually created by the divine beings. Here countless stories deal with the creation of the world and the universe, flood stories, and so forth. When these myths seek to explain "the origin of geographic features, animal traits, rites, taboos, and customs, they are referred to as etiological or explanatory narratives."[7] Children love these stories, and for good reason. Wha' child is not intrigued by the story of the bear and his short stubby tail? What adult does not empathize with the two lovers transformed into two mountains? Or what person fails to feel pity for the beautiful youth who falls in love with his own image and thus becomes the narcissus? The etiological tales are endless in number.

But let us proceed to the legend which is closely linked to the myth but does differ in some respects from that genre. Unlike the myth, the legend is generally secular in nature and is set in a less remote historical past. Although mostly migratory the legend tends, in many instances, to become localized. For example, "The Scratching at the Door" is a migratory legend which recounts the story of two co-eds who remained alone in their dormitory during the Christmas vacation because one had to wait for a late train and the other had to attend a fraternity party. They waited for the intercom but never heard anything until a hard knocking was heard in front of the dorm. The one girl thought it was her date so she went down and never came back. Late that night the girl who had stayed in the room heard a scratching and gasping down the hall. She was afraid so she locked herself in the room. The next morning when she opened the door of the room, she found the roommate with her throat cut. This same legend has become localized here at Miami University and is told

as an occurrence which took place at Oxford College in the past. The college students and teen-agers enjoy this type of legend very much.

Equally popular among young people, older children, and adults is the ghost legend. Although in the folklore of other countries some ghosts come back to seek revenge, this is not true of most American ghost narratives. Most ghosts in American folklore return to perform an unfinished task or to set right an error committed during their life time. In other words, the ghosts are not malevolent. As a matter of fact, some of them are friendly and warm. Take for example, "Casper, the Friendly Ghost."

Other genres under verbal folklore are the animal tale and the fable. These stories are a source of great pleasure to children. Children experience no difficulty in accepting animals which have human characteristics. As far as the child is concerned there is no reason why he cannot communicate with animals. He is delighted with the antics of the rabbit as a trickster who outwits all the other animals who are pursuing him. "The Tar Baby Story," "The Rabbit and the Fox," "The Town Musicians of Bremen" all hold the attention of the children.

Another type of tale which is particularly popular is the cumulative tale. The number of animals participating in this kind of narrative depends on the story teller and the children. An example of this tale is "The Old Woman Who Found A Penny."

The fable which is an animal tale with a moral is also a genre included under verbal folklore. Undoubtedly these brief narratives will continue to appeal to children. Though Aesop's Fables is really a literary work, its origins seem to stem from oral tradition.

Last but not least are tall tales and memorates. Tall tales are narratives which represent "a sort of reverse bragging." They are still very numerous but are the type of stories which seem to lose some of their charm when frozen into print. Their appeal resides primarily with the skilled raconteur. One example

will suffice to illustrate this genre: the ever popular stories of the biggest fish that got away.

Much more could be said about folklore but these remarks I hope will emphasize the tremendous wealth of material which constitutes folklore. Hundreds of books for children appear on the market each year and many of them are inspired by the tales which have long been the heritage of all people.

FOOTNOTES

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USING BIBLIOTHERAPY AND TELEVISION IN THE CLASSROOM: THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

by Alfred Ciani

University of Cincinnati

An elderly couple recently lamented to my wife and me that they just couldn't understand the kids of today. All they ever wanted to do was watch T.V. or read. I then thought to myself of the current research findings reporting the mean time for watching T.V. among school children as six hours per day. On school days, children are in classrooms approximately six hours. If children get eight hours of sleep, an approximate total of 20 hours per day is spent either sleeping, watching television or attending school. After thinking about these things, I reassured my elderly friends that they were indeed correct. Children do spend a great deal of time either watching television or reading.

Some T.V. Facts

Nancy Larrick in her revised (4th edition) A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading (1975) relates some startling statistics concerning television and children.

1. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 average 54 hours of television viewing per week.
2. The average preschool child spends more than 64% of his time watching T.V.
3. Upon high school graduation, these children will have spent 11,000 hours in school and 22,000 hours watching T.V.
4. 96% of the homes in the United States have at least one television set. This is a larger percentage than those who have flush toilets.
5. In a 1971 Christian Science Monitor survey during one week of T.V. viewing, there were 217 incidents of violence and 125 killings reported by researchers.
6. A University of Arizona investigation reports that by age 14, a child has seen 18,000 human beings killed on television.

I mentioned above that these were startling statistics. Is it any wonder that teachers report increased anxiety, tension, restlessness, suspicion, shorter time spans, less respect for adults, and a decreased regard for school in their elementary school students? Yet, we should not abandon all hope.

In a recent journal article, Adams and Harrison (1975) suggest that teachers are not using television to its fullest potential. They elaborate with specific reading skills which could be developed while watching television. Skill development is certainly one area which needs to be stressed. I would like to suggest an additional area, the one which deals with feelings and emotions and the affective domain, the art of bibliotherapy.

Russell and Shrodes (1950) suggest that bibliotherapy involves three processes: identification; catharsis; and insight. Identification is the most difficult and time consuming. Here the reader is exposed to books in the hope that he may identify with a particular character and that character's problems and difficulties. It is here that the process of catharsis begins.

According to Spache (1963), catharsis in bibliotherapy is the emotional sharing of feelings and motivations of the character in the book. The more the reader can identify with a character and to the extent they share similar experiences, the easier it is for the reader to relive the conflicts and emotions of his alter ego.

Insight is the final process and entails a realization by the reader that he can make a more satisfactory adjustment to life and his particular problems. It is here that he is able to step back and view his concerns with objectivity and in a clear perspective. He may choose the solution employed by the character in the book or adopt one more suited to his personal needs.

The teacher's task is to identify the needs of students and then be able to recommend books with which students could identify. Obviously, classroom teachers must be well acquainted with children's and adolescents' books in order to be able to guide students. Furthermore, a close working relationship should be established with the school and public librarians. It is these people who are most able to help us locate specific books for specific needs.

It behooves us as teachers, librarians, parents and all who influence children to help each person develop to the fullest potential. Children and adolescents devote a great deal of their time to television viewing. It is about time we educators devoted more of our time in enmeshing television viewing and reading. One suggestion with high potential is bibliotherapy.

Inside/Out

There is a television program available today that can be of real assistance to the teaching of reading. The program, Inside/Out, is a series of thirty minute programs. Using "slice of life" vignettes, these Emmy winning programs provide the classroom teacher with a productive procedure for working with children and their problems. The thirty programs take children through experiences they will encounter as they grow, including loving, hurting, and other societal problems with which they will have to struggle. The series is the result of extensive research by health and elementary educators as well as broadcasting specialists, psychologists and psychiatrists. It deals with the most common emotional problems facing 8 to 10 year olds.

The programs provide a framework for classroom discussions of the children's social, emotional and physical concerns. This further provides teachers with a method of "getting through" to their students' feelings and the affective domain. Other programs which are aired through your local community educational television station are Becoming Me for ages one through three; Career Awareness, ages four through six; Bread and Butterflies, ages four through seven, and Self Incorporated, ages six through eight.

Once you contact the television station, they will send you a viewing guide for each of the programs you request. Television/film programs such as these can enable teachers to more effectively and affectively assist their students in coping with

life. The programs are not training films. Rather, they serve to motivate children's interest in life coping skills and to motivate them to improve the way in which they cope with life's events. Bibliotherapy, the process of using children's literature as a tool to help students deal with their own personal problems, is a perfect partner for these educational television programs.

Perhaps David Russell (1952), in a journal article almost 25 years ago, stated it best when he referred to bibliotherapy as reading and the healthy personality.

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THE CRITIC AND THE CHILD

by Rebecca Lukens
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"You're forgetting the child in all this literary criticism," says an insistent voice. "Does the reader get a false impression of Indians from the story? Will the child think all Indians are savages? Worthless and thieving? All noble and silent and proud?" The questioner is concerned about the child.

But the literary critic, too, is concerned about the child. The critic says, "These Indians are stereotypes. Stereotypes are inadequate central characters." Whatever the terms, the teacher and the critic both have at heart the welfare of the reading child. There is no real argument: a story must please children and say something to them.

Not long ago I heard of a course at Bryn Mawr called, "Children's Literature to Foster the Love of Reading." That sounds right to the critic, and it should suit the child. We know that taking children out of their protective home environments, exposing them to all kinds of places and situations, broadens them, educates them, matures and humanizes them. Literature exposes children to all kinds of places and situations, far more than a parent can. Literature simultaneously gives children pleasure and stretches their understanding of people, of society, and particularly of themselves.

Good literature is good literature; it satisfies both children and critics. As proof, notice how Charlotte's Web has been a best seller since its publication. Madeline has been beloved since 1939, The Little House books since 1932, Peter Rabbit since 1901, Tom Sawyer since 1876, Little Women since 1868, and Alice in Wonderland since 1865. No amount of critical approval could have kept Tom Sawyer or Little Women alive if children did not approve of them.

What makes a good book good to both critic and child?

Take character. Few characters in fiction have lasted as long in popularity as Jo March. To the critic Jo is a round

and well-developed character. To girls, she is Everygirl. Jo is the center of her family, alive, aggressive and tomboyish, awkward and clumsy. She invents, acts, directs, and costumes the family Christmas play. She complains and teases, sings off-key, and resents any restriction that would turn her into a stereotyped girl. She dreams of heroism in active roles. Readers are so busy identifying with Jo that when she ties up her long hair, they sigh in recognition: "Hair! What a bother!" Girls who look back at Little Women are surprised at the long paragraphs, the complex sentences, and the polysyllabic vocabulary--all apparently part of their childhood. An essential element in good fiction, sound character development, has kept them reading. They look at Jo March and at Tom Sawyer and say, "That Tom, he's real. Jo March, too." The critic agrees.

To return to the American Indian, the teacher who is afraid children will get wrong ideas about Indians from a book is concerned with a critical judgment; stereotyping does anyone, particularly an ethnic group, an injustice. As critics we are pleased that Jennifer of Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth...is child first and black incidentally, that Peter of A Snowy Day reacts to snow like a child and not like an oddity. Critics and children agree. To Amos Fortune Free Man children comment, "Aw, he's too good to be true." Critics ought to agree with children.

Look next at plot and conflict. When a child finds a dull book, the reaction is often, "Nothing happens. I didn't even finish it." The critic replies, "I don't blame you. Inadequate conflict and suspense." By contrast, look at the suspense of Charlotte's Web. From line one of chapter one we are held by Wilbur and his conflict with profit-making farm society. Our adrenalin flows from beginning to end: Uncle's winning the blue ribbon, Lurvy's comments on Wilbur as ham and bacon, and finally the new award for Wilbur. Safe at last. While the critic uses the term foreshadowing, the child has another phrase: "I think I know what's going to happen!" The child says with a sigh of satisfaction, "I knew it would end that way!" The critic's term

is inevitability.

Point of view is a critical term, and we may think it has little to do with children. At the same time, we wish children to identify with the main character. That is the key to the success of Peter Rabbit. It would be a different story if Mother Rabbit told it: "That Peter..jackets and shoes..but I love him just the same." Or if prim Flopsy told it: "Peter ought to know better." Or if Cottontail told it: "Boy, Peter's got nerve!" But this is Peter's story, Peter who is like every child: adventursome, greedy, curious, panicky, intelligent, tearful. Children identify with Peter; they do not beg for the story to be told that good bunnies always obey. While the child says, "Read me again. About Peter Rabbit." the critic says, "Successful point of view."

Few books have been as successful as The Little House books. No encyclopedia article ever made a twentieth century child actually live in pioneer days as Wilder's stories have, because they know how Laura feels about smoking the pig, falling into soft snow from a stump, loving a cloth and yarn doll, eating sugar snow. There have been other stories written about pioneer days, but none so successful as Wilder's. The child loves them, and the critic sees why.

Story tellers vary. Some tell us what happened next: "And then, and then,and then." We soon weary of their tales. Others use suspense: "You'll never guess what happened next--." Other story tellers, those we enjoy most, make us say to ourselves, "That's true. Family life is enlarging and confining. As for my brother, it's a love/hate relationship." This story teller is reaching for significance that goes beyond merely "what happened next?"- significance that makes some kind of over-arching point. The critic calls it theme.

To return to Peter Rabbit, it is Peter's nature that makes the child identify with Peter, but it is the theme that holds it all together, the satisfying theme of loving acceptance. Children know the theme, but it is never underlined, never preached

at them. Theme need not be underlined, didactic, as the critics say. Children see that friendship is sensational in Charlotte's Web, that growing up was different in pioneer days, or that we show love in all kinds of ways--as Where the Wild Things Are shows us. Such themes give children optimistic views of the world, says the critic. "I like that book," says the child.

We may think that style is imposed on the story after it is written. Children, critics and writers know that style is story. O'Dell's style in Island of the Blue Dolphins is suited to the strength and dignity of Karana and her struggle. The style of Kipling's Just So Stories is suited to the playful, tongue-in-cheek pourquoi tale. In Madeline, Bemelman's little girls live their lives "in two straight lines," while "a crack in the ceiling has the habit of looking like a rabbit." E.B. White uses every stylistic device open to children, both to please us and to help us understand the nature of friendship, and of maternal love. Connotations, metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, hyperbole and understatement, sound devices and rhythm are all parts of Charlotte's Web. White even parodies the folk tale, the prize fight and the square dance. Does the critic approve? The critic is delighted, as delighted as the child.

If we expect the child to discover a love of reading, to discover themselves and the world through books, then in the words of Walter de la Mare, we must give them "the rarest kind of best." Someone once asked me, "Who cares about criticism, as long as it's a good book." Children care about criticism, that's who.

ANECDOTES ABOUT AMERICAN AUTHORS

by Mabel E. Eldridge
Franklin, Ohio

"I feel that children's Books and interest in them is one of the nicest ways of meeting people," wrote Gail Haley, former Caldecott Medal Winner.

"One of the nicest ways" of meeting authors and illustrators of children's books is not only through reading their works, but also by interviewing them personally. Though the title of this talk is "Anecdotes about American Authors," the anecdotes were collected incidentally as part of a study concerning childhood influences affecting the success of the creative prize-winning adults interviewed.

Maia Wojciechowska

A somewhat controversial author interviewed is Maia Wojciechowska, Newbery Medal winner for Shadow of a Bull. In that book and in Single Light, and others, she writes movingly with power, beauty, and artistry. Her Tuned Out, a forceful, disturbing story of a youth's struggle with drugs and with brotherly love, could well affect young people faced with the problem. Other of her realistic novels dealing with what she sees as youth's problems, some readers find offensive.

To me, Maia Wojciechowska seemed an interesting and mercurial personality. During a dinner conversation she revealed much about herself. As a small child she felt overshadowed by her brilliant older brother, always the center of attention. She claims that she felt no need to talk until she was four and a half, and that her first words were, "Why must this world be so cruel?" At five and a half she wrote her first book. Her aunts, who thought it wonderful, took it to a publisher, who informed them that it was copied word for word from Hans Christian Andersen. That temporarily ended Maia's writing career, but not her reading.

Aside from Andersen's and Grimms' Fairy Tales, her reading was chiefly adult. She read The Three Musketeers in Polish;

a novel called Cinderella; an Italian story, D'Amici; Cooper's, Mark Twain's and Dickens' works, and by the age of twelve, the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. She often read by the light of the moon and under the covers with a candle until she set herself on fire with the latter.

Maia's formal schooling was sketchy. On her first day of school she gazed dreamily out the window.

"What are you doing?" asked the teacher.

"Thinking," answered Maia.

"Stop it!" commanded the teacher.

When Maia returned home and told her father, he withdrew her from school, and she did not return until she was ten. When attending high school she turned in a paper on Lord Byron, for which she received an F. "Too long," said the teacher in the Catholic School. Maia thought that there were other reasons.

She adored her father and was much influenced by him. An aviator, he taught her to parachute.

World War II was cruel to Maia and her family. As they were fleeing from Poland, they were strafed by the enemy. All the refugees but Maia flung themselves into a ditch by the roadside. Maia, however, tried to get near the plane so that she could get a good look at the attacker. She wanted to see the face of her would-be killer. He returned four times and tried to hit her, but failed and finally flew away.

On a train from Krakow to Roumania she felt that she had won a moral victory. Maia hadn't eaten for some time and was very hungry. In the same coach with her was an obviously wealthy lady feeding her poodle luscious looking grapes. The girl longed for some. Finally, after feeding her poodle, the lady offered some condescendingly to Maia, who proudly refused them.

Arriving in the United States at the age of seventeen, she met Rupert Hughes, a friend of Polish people in California. Encouraged by him she wrote a series of sketches about her experiences. Deciding that Harpers should be her publishers, upon reaching New York, she walked into the publisher's office

and announced to the astonished secretary that here was a manuscript for them.

"I'll be back for it tomorrow," she said as she left.

Harpers didn't publish it, but the following year a Polish magazine did. It was later attacked by a long Communist editorial.

Such were the varied and sometimes disturbing childhood and teen experiences of Maia Wojciechowska - experiences that have doubtless affected her work.

Walter D. Edmonds

Walter D. Edmonds spends his winters in Concord, Massachusetts, and his summers near Boonville, New York, on a farm that belonged to his father. It was here that Walter Edmonds was born.

In a letter arranging for an interview he had written: "It is true...that nearly all my work has in one way or another had its roots in our place in Boonville. I was born there and still sleep in the room in which I was born--rather unique in modern day America."

It was on the farm near Boonville that we talked one showery July morning about Walter Edmond's boyhood. Mr. Edmonds came out with an umbrella to meet me and usher me into the big comfortable white farmhouse--of thirteen or so rooms--built about 1873. The rooms are spacious, with a fireplace in each of the larger rooms. We entered the living room, big and cheerful with plenty of windows. One side was lined with low bookcases. There was a table in the middle of the room with a davenport backed up to it invitingly facing the fireplace.

Though most people seem to know Walter Edmonds better for his Drums Along the Mohawk and adult novels, some dramatized for the movies, he has written many stories for children: among them The Matchlock Gun, (winner of the Newbery Award), They Had A Horse, Two Logs Crossing, Wilderness Clearing, Corporal Bess, Caedmus Henry, Mr. Benedict's Lion, The Musket and The Cross, Wolf Hunt, Beaver Valley, (won the Chicago Tribune-Washington

Post prize), Seven American Stories, Bert Breen's Barn (winner of 1976 National Book Award), and Time To Go House, written for his grandchildren. In that book the animals come into the house: a racoon, weasels, rats, mice, flying squirrels, and an old white dog.

When Walter stayed alone once--or just with his father--animals did seek shelter in the house. One evening, before the lamps were lighted, he had been standing outdoors in the twilight. As he started into the front hallway, he saw two mice on the steps, paws folded, jumping from step to step. That scene is in the book.

Walter had a sound formal education. He attended Cutler School in New York, then went to St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, then to Choate School at Wallingford, Connecticut. Here at the age of twelve he had an unusual teacher. On the last day of the school week this teacher always read to the boys, usually a Sherlock Holmes story. The boys loved this practice. It was this teacher who had the boys write about their own experiences and about places they knew. Walter wrote of the central New York community he knew and loved so well. He also wrote about farm animals. The teacher read these stories to the other boys, who regarded Walter highly because of them. His pride in having his stories admired and enjoyed spurred him to continue writing.

As a boy Walter roamed over the farm and the Mohawk region--all territory so well known in his stories. He was (and is) familiar with the Black River Canal and the Erie. The former carried water to the Erie. There are seventy-five locks between Boonville and Rome, and Mr. Edmonds knows them all. The canal boats ran until about 1915.

Young Walter loved to read as well as to roam the countryside. He read of the heroes of ancient Greece and Rome, of Indians, Plutarch from end to end, Rider Haggard's She and seven others. "I went on a Dickens jag," he said. "I read every-

thing by Dickens, then on a Thackeray jag." He loved Swift's Gulliver's Travels.

Later, in college, he read Swift's Journal To Stella, recommended by his distinguished teacher at Harvard, Charles Townsend Copeland. It was Copeland's encouragement and the success he had while studying under Copeland that helped him choose a career as a writer.

Elizabeth Yates

Elizabeth Yates has won many honors for her writing: the Newbery Award for Amos Fortune Free Man; the William Allen White Award, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Award, the Sarah Josepha Hale Award to a distinguished author whose work and life reflect the literary tradition of New England.

Miss Yates' letter in response to a request for an interview reveals her friendliness:

"I can think of nothing pleasanter," she wrote, "than to chat together about books, childhood influences, and the wide and wonderful world of creativity....

Since you are to be in New Hampshire, I do hope you will come to my home--for luncheon, tea, or whatever fits in with your plans. We can sit on the porch and feast our eyes on the distant hills while we talk of things dear to our hearts."

A friendly Elizabeth met me at the door. She ushered me to the comfortable back porch, where we talked as she had suggested in her letter, enjoyed the birds (a humming bird dived into the pink honeysuckle by the porch), and absorbed the lovely scenery.

There we talked of the early influences in her life. Reading has always been one of the most powerful influences. Next to the youngest in a family of seven, she was often read to by her parents. Both her father and mother read aloud. The following books Elizabeth loved: most important, At the Back of the North Wind, by George McDonald, the works of Miss Mullock,

Alice in Wonderland, Little Women, all the rest of Louisa May Alcott's books, The Secret Garden, Dickens' works, all of Scott, Conrad, George Eliot, and Jane Austen. From the age of five to the present she has read the Bible. In later years she was influenced by the philosophy of Browning, by Blake, Eliot again, and by Hardy. She loved Wind in the Willows, especially the passage about the Gates of Dawn. She loved,too, the St. Nicholas Magazine and often sent stories and poems to the League, a department of the magazine, to encourage young writers. She read all the classics. Her sister, ten years older, drew up a list of books she told Elizabeth she must read to be properly educated, and Elizabeth read them. She liked to get under the table to read. When churning butter, she would churn with one hand with a book in the other. One day it took seven hours for the butter to come, but Elizabeth kept churning and read almost all of Nicholas Nickleby.

As far back as she can remember she wanted to write. She drew pictures of letters when she was quite small. She also kept a diary, a practice that helped marshall her thinking.

Elizabeth loved school and felt that she had very good teachers, who encouraged her. She attended a small school in Buffalo, New York. There were only about two hundred students; the classes were small. Elizabeth's education was strictly classical: Greek, Latin, history, math, languages, no science. In English class she wrote two themes a week, individually corrected by her teacher. All fine points were carefully corrected: spelling, punctuation, etc.

Her winters were spent in Buffalo, her summers on her father's farm south of Buffalo. Elizabeth loved the country, and life there influenced her greatly.

Her parents, home, and family played a vital part in her success. Her father was a kind but stern disciplinarian, not given to being demonstrative with his affection, but a wise and concerned father. Her mother always wanted the children to do their best. When Elizabeth would gain some success with her

writing, her mother would say, "Very nice, dear, do some more;" a little word of encouragement, but never too much praise. Though the parents disciplined their children, they made it clear that the best discipline is self discipline.

Instead of going to college, Elizabeth preferred to continue her writing as a career. Though it was ten years before she gained recognition and acceptance, she kept at her work. Her many books reflect her sound philosophy and idealism.

Gail Haley is right. "Children's books and an interest in them is one of the nicest ways of meeting people," especially the people who write and illustrate those books, I would add. You never can tell what kind of experiences you will have or what kind of personalities you may meet, but you may be sure that they'll never be dull.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING AND PUBLISHING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

by Nicholas P. Georgiady
Miami University

The present market for new children's books is an excellent one. Publishers are interested in new ideas for worthwhile publications for young readers. Teachers can and should do more writing along this line for it is they who know more about children's reading interests and needs than anyone else. For those interested in trying their hand at writing and publishing children's books, here are some brief suggestions.

1. Select a topic that's interesting to children at a given age level, preferably one that is new.
2. Write the story in a way which could be read by this age group. Check vocabulary levels, too.
3. Try the manuscript out on your own children, young relatives, young friends, or a nearby school class. Children can be severe and honest critics.
4. Think of some reasons why your book should be published. Will it sell? Will it fill a need? Sell your book!
5. Pick a reputable publisher to send it to. Pick one that seems to have the same ideas as you do. There are many lists of publishers in your local library. Also, check the New York Times Sunday Book Section.
6. Illustrations are not essential as most large publishers have staff artists to handle this.
7. Be patient. Publishers get thousands of manuscripts and these take time to evaluate.
8. Be philosophic. A rejection slip is not the end of the world. Try another publisher--and another. There are countless stories of great books that were initially rejected. Yours may be one, too.
9. Keep writing if only for the practice. Also keep looking for new ideas. You never know when a terrific one will come along and when it does, you want to be ready.